

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006557

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2015

TAGS: [PREL PHUM IS IR TU AE GOI EXTERNAL HUMANITARIAN AID ISRAELI SOCIETY ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS](#)
SUBJECT: A/S LOWENKRON'S CONSULTATIONS AT THE MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR NORMAN H. OLSEN, FOR REASONS 1.4 (b)
AND (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: DRL Assistant Secretary Barry Lowenkron discussed a range of democracy and human rights reform issues with senior MFA officials Yoram Ben-Zeev, Aharon Leshno Yaar and Harry Kneiy-Tal. Topics included the November 14 BMENA Forum for the Future meeting in Bahrain, internal developments in Syria and Iran, and U.S. plans to press for a smaller, more credible Human Rights Commission. Ben-Zeev said that many in the GOI remain skeptical about BMENA and the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, but that he supported the initiative and wanted to explore ways Israel could contribute. Yaar reported that the GOI supports the USG drive to create a more effective Human Rights Commission and has adopted a more cooperative attitude toward special rapporteurs, with the exception of Special Rapporteur John Dugard, whose tenure and mandate the GOI would like to end. Kneiy-Tal said the GOI does not foresee near-term change in either Syria or Iran, whose governments face differing external constraints but retain a firm grip on internal control. END SUMMARY.

GOI CAUTIOUS ABOUT AIMS OF BMENA, BUT ASKS TO PARTICIPATE

12. (C) A/S Lowenkron told MFA Deputy Director General and Head for North America Yoram Ben-Zeev that the Forum for the Future has attracted great interest from BMENA countries. As evidence of this trend, Lowenkron cited a dramatic increase in government and NGO participation in BMENA. While only a few middle eastern governments attended the June 2004 Sea Island G-8 Summit, almost every government in the region and a few NGOs attended the December 2004 BMENA Forum for the Future in Rabat, and all the governments in the region, including Iran and Syria, plus 40 NGOs, attended the just-completed BMENA Forum for the Future in Bahrain. During the forum, Lowenkron said, governments and NGOs actively debated democratization ideas in the region.

13. (C) Ben-Zeev said that the GOI seeks to participate in BMENA. He cautioned, however, that skeptical Israeli officials perceive two main problems with BMENA. "Deep in our hearts," Ben-Zeev said, "we don't believe democracy will work in this region." If it does work, Ben-Zeev added, Israeli officials believe it will bring Islamists to power.

14. (C) Ben-Zeev said that he personally thinks the GOI will gain from democratization in the region. He said he understands that BMENA reflects a long-term, strategic goal rather than a short-term, tactical policy. GOI officials, Ben-Zeev suggested, "can help BMENA by describing how the GOI introduced democracy to Arab-Israelis." A/S Lowenkron asked Ben-Zeev to send him the GOI's ideas for participation in BMENA, and a list of Israeli NGOs that might participate. He also urged Ben-Zeev to "overcome your skeptics."

GOI TO COOPERATE ON HR COMMISSION, RAPPOREURS

15. (C) A/S Lowenkron told MFA Deputy Director General for UN and International Organizations Affairs Aharon Leshno Yaar that the USG will press for a small, credible Human Rights Commission. The USG goal is to deny membership to states that violate human rights: "to make sure the bad guys are never there and the good guys are in" On balance, he felt that the former is more important than the latter.

16. (C) Yaar reported that the GOI supports the USG drive to create a more effective Human Rights Commission. He said that he will work on a committee led by Swiss Permanent Representative to the UN Peter Maurer in New York in order to understand and influence Swiss ideas for reforming the Human Rights Commission.

17. (C) Yaar said the GOI has adopted a more cooperative approach to special rapporteurs, but seeks to change the mandate for the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, John Dugard. When Dugard's second term finishes next year, Yaar said, the GOI will request not only a new rapporteur, but a more fair and

balanced mandate that takes terrorism into account. More broadly, Yaar said, GOI officials hope their positive attitude toward the UN will reduce European antipathy toward Israel. "Instead of complaining, we are looking for ways to cooperate with and support the UN, while at the same time not ignoring the problems with some resolutions and several committees." Yaar noted that the GOI has begun sponsoring more resolutions than ever before in the UN Third Committee.

18. (C) Yaar added, however, that his effort to convince his colleagues in the MFA to take UN reform seriously has been a real struggle, not only because they believe a number of UN resolutions unfairly target Israel, but also because they perceive the Europeans to be virulently anti-Israel. Yaar cited as typical of European disdain for Israel the French reaction to the GOI vote against UNESCO's global convention for the protection of cultural diversity. The French have threatened to retaliate, Yaar reported, by voting against appointment of the Israeli architect nominated to serve as a member of the World Heritage Committee.

GOI DOES NOT FORESEE CHANGE IN SYRIA OR IRAN

19. (C) MFA Director of the Center for Political Research Harry Kneiy-Tal told Lowenkron that the GOI does not foresee near-term change in either Syria or Iran. Kneiy-Tal said that the GOI sees Bashar Assad as weakened but in control, and believes it is possible to change Assad's behavior without changing his regime. Assad's downfall, Kneiy-Tal said, could even provide Al Qaeda an opportunity to take over the whole country. Kneiy-Tal claimed that three internal groups currently oppose Assad: the liberals, who are not organized; the Kurds, whom Assad has appeased through promises of citizenship; and the Islamists, who represent a significant and growing threat. None of these groups, Kneiy-Tal said, have yet created any "cracks in Assad's inner circle," members of which have remained loyal and united. Buoyed by this resolute group of insiders, Kneiy-Tal said, Assad has effectively used the Baath Party as a tool to retain control of the country.

110. (C) Kneiy-Tal said Assad hopes he can apply the "China model" in Syria, fostering economic development while retaining political control. Assad has recognized that total isolation will undermine this goal, Kneiy-Tal said, and Assad is even willing to cut a deal with the USG, wherein the Syrians will cooperate on issues related to Iraq if the U.S. will tone down its pressure on Assad's regime. Assad has also turned to Russian leaders, Kneiy-Tal reported, to help his regime through diplomatic gestures. Kneiy-Tal said Russian officials seek to gain prestige by communicating on behalf of the international community with leaders in both Damascus and Tehran, that they can avert international pressure if they change their behavior.

111. (C) Iranian leaders, however, have more options to respond to external demands than do Syrian leaders, Kneiy-Tal said, because they have leverage with the EU-3 and can use Iran's oil reserves to influence India, China, Russia, and others. Kneiy-Tal explained that this shield against foreign influence has contributed to the increasingly insular nature of political dialogue in Iran. Whereas during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami conservatives and reformers debated one another, now debate occurs only within conservative circles, between ideologues and pragmatists, Kneiy-Tal said. The key question, according to Kneiy-Tal, remains the extent to which Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will rein in President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's
Classified SIPRNET website.

JONES